

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE SUBJECT: JOINT TASK FORCE GUANTANAMO  
BRIEFER: GENERAL GREGORY J. ZANETTI, DEPUTY COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE  
GUANTANAMO MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE  
OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT  
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MR. HOLT: (In progress) -- the deputy commander for Joint Task Force  
Guantanamo. And thank you very much for joining us today, sir.

GEN. ZANETTI: It's an honor to be here. And thank you for everybody  
who's on the line and care about this mission. I appreciate it.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Now, do you have any opening statements,  
anything you want to start us off with?

GEN. ZANETTI: Well, I'll just say this. As I've gone around, most  
people ask about the three Cs, Jack. They ask about the camps. They ask  
about the commissions process for coming up. And they ask about what's going on  
in Cuba. And so any questions that come along those lines, I'd be glad to  
answer.

On the commissions part, I will do a quick disqualification. I'm not  
an attorney, so the Office of Military Commissions is what's handling the legal  
side of it. As far as JTF GTMO goes, we are doing the logistic security support  
for the commissions process. So if you hit me with a legal question, I'll  
probably beg off on it.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Well, and with that, we can get started.

Griff Jenkins, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Hey, General, good morning. Griff Jenkins, Fox News.

GEN. ZANETTI: Yeah, nice to talk to you.

Q General, I'm fully aware that you can't be asked a question  
politically in nature. But I have to ask you that -- and there's always a  
"but," right?

GEN. ZANETTI: (Laughs.) That's your job, Griff.

Q All three of the presidential candidates have indicated strongly  
that they would close Guantanamo.

GEN. ZANETTI: Right.

Q They would close GTMO, Senators Clinton, Obama and McCain. So my question is, can you comment on whether there's contingency planning going on? Is there something that you're taking into consideration in terms of you doing the logistics and all of GTMO, and also how you think, if one of these three candidates gets elected and swiftly closes Guantanamo, how that would affect the larger war on terror?

GEN. ZANETTI: Well, I can say this. In some ways, Griff, we get a little bit of a conflicting message. On the one hand, we are going through with the commissions process. That's clear. And if legal proceedings run the way I think they run, it could take years before we finish that process. We have also built some permanent type facilities down there to house detainees.

At the same time, as you already know, we are drawing down dramatically the number of detainees. We've gone from 775, 780 at our peak back in 2002-2003. We're down to around 275. Griff, my guess is we're going to go even lower, you know, over the next several months.

So we're actually doing two things at the same time. On the one hand, we're planning for a mission that seems that it might endure a little longer than most people think. At the same time, we are, in some ways, already beginning the closing process as we draw down the population.

And my focus and Admiral Busby's focus is the same. How do we keep the troopers focused on the mission at hand, which is let's do our duty, let's provide safe, humane care and custody, let's support the commissions process, let's do it on this island nation, and we'll let the policymakers above us decide how all this plays out, and we'll salute and do our duty and follow orders.

Q If I could just follow up. You mentioned, you know, you guys are focused on the day to day. Is there a sense among the guys down there in island paradise that perhaps --

GEN. ZANETTI: (Laughs.) Island paradise (in one sense ?).

Q -- a quick, precipitous closure would certainly affect what you're trying to do in the larger scope of the war on terror?

GEN. ZANETTI: Well, I mean, as far as you say the quick closure, the issue, as you know, will be cooperation at levels way above mine, Chris. I mean, the State Department, I know, is working very hard with Yemen and African nations and Middle Eastern nations to repatriate the detainees back to their home countries. It's clear that the United States does not want to be the world's jailer.

Now, getting that cooperation and working through these obviously very political deals is far more difficult than I think people appreciate. So, you know, saying that there would be a quick closure -- I don't know if that would actually happen.

I'm sorry. What was the follow-on part of that that maybe I'm missing?

Q No, that's fine. I just was curious if there was a sense with the guys that are actually on the ground there at the talk coming out of the campaigns.

GEN. ZANETTI: Well, what they would say is, you know, "If you want to shut it down, line up the airplanes, we'll load these guys on, and we'll go home to our families." So if they decide to shut it down, we'll shut it down. We'll do it professionally and in a disciplined way, and we'll try to do it at the least cost to the American taxpayer.

Q Thank you, sir.

GEN. ZANETTI: All right. Thanks, Griff.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Andrew.

Q General, Andrew Lubin from Military Observer. GEN. ZANETTI: Hi, Andrew.

Q (Inaudible.) General, I'm not a lawyer either, so I'm going to ask --

GEN. ZANETTI: (Laughs.)

Q -- a (complicated ?) question that (confuses ?) everybody.

GEN. ZANETTI: Okay.

Q I'm looking in the papers in the past several years on this, and it seems that the commission system -- if they want to close the loop on (ruffled ?) versus (unruffled ?) detainees and all, it seems kind of odd that all these detainees, many of the detainees who were easily released, are coming out of Britain and Canada, who are our allies, whereas the others are not. Can you comment on that?

And a follow-up question is that with Guantanamo being relatively unpopular, assuming the American public follows it, why not take a bad guy like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, put him on trial and say, "Guys, here's who's here. Here's why he's here. He's on trial.

" Why drag this out for so many years?

GEN. ZANETTI: Well, let's address the first question. We have released a number of detainees, although they haven't all been to, I'll say, allied nations. And I'm going to do this poorly, because Saudi Arabia obviously is an ally, but, you know, not like Britain or Canada, you would say.

Q Britain, Canada or Australia, exactly.

GEN. ZANETTI: But we have released hundreds back to Saudi Arabia, and Andrew, it's been a huge success. And here's why. The Saudis have an amazing program where they're released from Guantanamo Bay. My understanding is they go back to a Saudi detention facility, and then the Saudis bring in more moderate imams and mullahs and clerics to say, "You know, maybe you didn't read the Koran the way that you should read it."

They then bring in family members and members of their tribe and kin folk, and they really actually begin kind of a deprogramming process. They then give the former detainee a house, a car, a wife and a job. And Andrew, you

know; you've got a house, car, wife and job, you just don't have time to blow people up. You're busy.

Q Yeah.

GEN. ZANETTI: So it has been a remarkable success. And I know Yemen is trying to copy the program, although it's expensive, and Yemen does not always have the resources that the Saudis have. But throughout the Middle East, we're seeing this kind of pattern. We're just saying, "Yes, we can take them. And not only will we take them, but we will rehabilitate them."

And so it's been a big success story that really hasn't been reported on very well. And hats off to our Middle Eastern allies and also the State Department, because they've done yeoman's work on this.

And I'm sorry. What was the second question, Andrew? I rambled on there.

Q (Inaudible) -- again with people using -- (inaudible) -- Guantanamo Bay as a political football. Why not take a guy who's a no-question bad guy, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and put him on trial? GEN. ZANETTI: Well, we're going to. He was charged -- oh, gosh -- a number of weeks back. And all that is coming down the track at us like a freight train. So the 9/11 detainees have already -- six of them have been charged. And my guess is, throughout this summer and into the fall, you're going to be seeing all of the arraignments and the pretrial motions, and the trial is going to happen.

I was actually with General Hartman yesterday, and he's at the Office of Military Commissions, and, Andrew, he has a very aggressive and proactive trial schedule. "Let's go, let's get this done," because he has the exact same feel about it that you do. "This is taking too long. Let's get off the schneid and make this happen."

Q Excellent. Thanks very much.

GEN. ZANETTI: Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Carissa.

Q Yeah, I was just curious about -- and this may seem -- this is Carissa Picard from Military Spouses for Change.

GEN. ZANETTI: Hi, Carissa.

Q HI. How are you?

GEN. ZANETTI: Good.

Q Good. This may seem like a very simplistic question, but with the language barrier, I guess, since you deal with the logistics and security at the facility and you have all these detainees from all these different countries, do you essentially have just a wide range of translators who are there when they talk?

GEN. ZANETTI: Carissa, we do. Yeah, we do. We have linguists who speak Urdu and Pashtu and Arabic, and even the Wiegers (sp) who are there, who are, you know, from northwestern China. You know, we have people who can

translate. And actually, a number of them speak very good English. But, yeah, we're able to communicate with them.

Q And do you find -- and this is going to seem a little bit strange, because I know that these are suspected terrorists, but I know several of these people have been there for a very, very long time and we hear a lot about, you know -- I hate to be the one to talk about the elephant in the room --

GEN. ZANETTI: Right.

Q -- but about, you know, there have been accusations, of course, of harsh interrogation techniques and what-not. But in a traditional prison setting, you know, when people have been together for long periods of time, sometimes they develop good relationships between -- GEN. ZANETTI: What, kind of like the Stockholm Syndrome?

Q Yeah, or something to that effect, between, you know, the detainees and the guards, some sort of -- a good living relationship. Has there been any sense like that or sort of understanding between these -- I don't know -- the guards and some of these prisoners? I mean, (with ?) the translators, is there some sort of -- what's the climate like in this kind of -- is it just constantly hostile, or is there something that, after this many years, it's --

GEN. ZANETTI: I see where you're going, so let's address the elephant in the room first, the charges of mistreatment, abuse, torture. I'll just say this. On my watch, I haven't seen anything like that, nor would I stand for it. And we're not going to allow that.

The only mistreatment and abuse I see inside the facility is detainee on the guards, and that's not even all of the detainees. I mean, a number of them are compliant. And I won't say that a relationship develops, for a couple of reasons. One is we don't encourage the guards to engage in conversation, and they don't. And the other reason is we do turn the guard force over about once a year or so.

And so while it's old news to the detainees, for the guard force, they're coming in new every year. And so they abide by the rules and don't -- and if they do start to get a relationship with one of the detainees, we pull them out because it's really not healthy for the detainee, nor is it good for the guard.

Some of the detainees are wonderful -- wonderful; I mean, they're detainees. But they're compliant. They obey the camp rules. And those that do move to a camp that we call Camp Four. And Camp Four -- envision "Hogan's Heroes." It's communal living. We segregate them by tribe or by nationality, and so they speak the language. And they have 12 hours a day outside and there's basketball and soccer and they eat kind of communal meals around picnic tables.

Then, for those who aren't compliant, they'll go to either Camp Five or Camp Six. And one of them is very high security. And, you know, there are problem children. And you know the stories, Carissa. They take every kind of human fluid and throw it at the guards or abuse the guards or kick the guards or head-butt the guards or bite the guards.

And, you know, they even do the stuff where they take their feces and they spread it on the walls of their cell. We jokingly call those guys "Poo-cassos," you know, because they paint with their own feces. And so how they're treated really depends on how well they comply with the camp rules. And so -- but as far as Stockholm Syndrome developing where we develop close relationships with the detainees, Carissa, I haven't seen that yet. Q Right. Right.

GEN. ZANETTI: Okay, did I miss something else?

Q No, no, that was sort of -- I was trying to envision what's sort of happening, because I know that some of these -- I guess I was thinking about how some of these detainees have been there for such a long period of time, how they're sort of adjusting to this.

GEN. ZANETTI: Yeah, (some have ?) adjusted. And actually -- they say, "You know, this really isn't so bad. I get three square meals a day. You know, I've got a place to live. You guys feed me. You do these things. My life back home wasn't all that good." Their medical care is outstanding. We have 100 medical personnel on hand for 275, approximately, detainees. Carissa, think about that. I mean, one for every 2.75? You don't have that.

Q Right. I'm an active-duty spouse, actually, so -- (inaudible).

GEN. ZANETTI: Yeah. I mean, you know, you go to the VA hospital and wait three hours because your kid's got a cold. If the detainee wants a root canal at 2:00 a.m., they actually get it. And so, you know, I wonder if -- maybe the best way I could explain this to you all while we're on the line is, has anybody ever explained to you something called the BUB, the Battle Update Brief? Do you want to hear about this, or --

Q Yes. Yes, I do. I think this is fascinating.

GEN. ZANETTI: All right.

The BUB is a daily briefing that happens in military places all over, and it takes place in a room that's just way too small, and there are no windows, and it occasionally smells bad. But we've got a U-shaped table. The staff sits down the sides. At the end of the table, Admiral Busby and I, along with the camp commander and the command sergeant major, sit. And then, one by one, the detainees -- I mean -- the detainees -- the camp NCOs stand up and give a report. "Well, what happened in the previous 24 hours?" They refer to the detainees by number. And as the number is said, they flash the picture of the detainee up on the screen.

So what I did was I actually kind of wrote down a few of the comments from above that happened a week and a half ago. And I think it actually kind of tells the story of, you know, how this -- of what a typical day is like for a guard. So I will do my best to recreate this right now. If I use the term rec, it's short for recreation. And obviously the names and the numbers, they're all made up. So here we go.

"Good morning, sir. Chief Simmons, Camp Six. We have 112 assigned, 112 present. Last night Detainee 765 requested onions and parsley on his salad and requested to see the camp commander regarding his request." (Detainee) 844 wants a better detainee newsletter, and 632 has requested a Bowflex machine because he says he's not getting enough of an upper-body workout.

"We had three significant activities last night, sir. (Detainee) 601 balled up feces, threw it at the guard, hitting him in the chest, saying next time he would hit him in the mouth. As 155 was being taken to rec, he bit a guard on the arm until it bled. Detainee was not allowed rec and had comfort items removed. When asked why he did that, 155 just laughed. The guard was sent to medical, where he is being evaluated. Finally, 767 yelled at female guard, saying, 'I am going to rape you. I am going to rape you. And when I get out of here, I'm going to kill you and your family.' Sir, barring any questions, that concludes my brief."

Now, I know you on the line are probably thinking, "Oh, this guy's just making this up." I couldn't make this up. I mean, it's kind of typical comments from above. I'm not there today, but it probably is the same type of thing that occurs every day. And that these troopers put up with this daily and don't fire back is a credit to their professionalism and discipline, in my book. So, anyway, if that gives you a better feel of what goes on daily, I hope it helps.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-up questions?

Q That was great. Thank you.

GEN. ZANETTI: Sure.

MR. HOLT: All right. And as we are just about out of time, Brigadier General Gregory Zanetti -- excuse me -- deputy commander, Joint Task Force Guantanamo. Sir, do you have any closing thoughts for us, closing comments?

GEN. ZANETTI: No. This is a whole new format for me, so thank all of you out there. We appreciate the chance to get the message out. I suspected actually some tougher questions. (Laughs.) But thank you. And I'd be happy to do this any time with any of you all. And again, thank you for what you do out there.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Q Thank you.

Q General, if I could interrupt a second --

GEN. ZANETTI: Sure.

Q Andrew Lubin from Military Observer. Is it possible to get a copy of -- (inaudible)?

GEN. ZANETTI: Yeah. I mean, I could -- what I could do is this actually --

Q That would be awesome, yeah.

GEN. ZANETTI: Yeah, this is actually a talk that I gave at the American Legion two days ago, and it actually -- I addressed the commissions process in here and the interface between the command and the legal side of it, which you all might find kind of interesting about, you know, how are we making this thing work. But, yeah, if you want me to, I could e-mail it to you, and use it as much as you want. So how do we get hold of you?

MR. HOLT: Well, sir, what you can do is e-mail it to me and I will make sure it gets distributed to them.

GEN. ZANETTI: Okay.

Q And I think it would be nice, too, because we hear so much about essentially how -- you know, the bad. There's been so much about, I guess, the accusations of torture and what-not. I think it's nice to hear a little bit about this other side or a little bit about what you're talking about -- you know, this; this is what it's like. It's just the day-to-day -- this is what you see going on under your command. These are what these service members are doing. This is what life is like.

GEN. ZANETTI: Right.

Q This is what it is. This is, you know, just a snapshot.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Q I think this is a little bit more what people need to know.

GEN. ZANETTI: Thanks, Carissa.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you very much.

And General, we look forward to speaking with you again. And I'll get that distributed to the folks on the line here. And then perhaps we can do this again here in a few more weeks.

GEN. ZANETTI: Jack, I'd love to.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you, sir.

GEN. ZANETTI: Thanks, guys.

Q General, thanks very much.

END.